

Abdominal Exercise Basics

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I've found that the hardest thing to teach total beginners to calisthenics and those coming from a sedentary lifestyle is generating and holding tension throughout the entire midsection. The importance of this cannot be overstated in calisthenics, gymnastics, and martial arts. The implications for martial arts should be obvious - if you can't maintain tension in your midsection, how can you safely take a body blow or throw a powerful blow of your own? In progressive calisthenics, full body tension is an essential aspect of most skills, and as such, in progression.

I help beginners pattern abdominal and full body tension through two very short and easy to learn drills. One drill is rolling from a pushup position to a "hollow" leaning plank, and the other is moving from "six inches" to "supine hollow body hold". Pictures of both may be viewed through the links below:

<http://media.gymnasticswod.com/nakapedia/a00052/a00052.jpg>

<http://i.ytimg.com/vi/mZtJAiaG7hY/hqdefault.jpg>

If the student finds the plank too hard to hold for long, I have them regress the beginning posture to an incline that they can hold with, at most, mild to moderate discomfort in the muscles for 10 to 15 seconds at a time. Basically, it has to be just hard enough to hold to be a challenge, without exhausting him or her too quickly; the goal is to work on the posture, coordination, and technique. Strength gains in total beginners are largely from neuromuscular gains. This means becoming more efficient at movement and using your muscles in a more coordinated way as you learn new skills, not just making your muscles themselves stronger.

Some other invaluable "hollow hold" variations once you are comfortable with the previous two - hollow hold dead hang (using an overhead bar, pullup bar, or even a sturdy tree branch), front jump support (as done in gymnastics), inverted front hang, inverted back hang, Australian hollow hold (so named because you "go down under" the bar, and it more or less looks like an inverted hollow leaning plank)

I've developed the above approach over time, and is a mixture of my experience in martial arts, gymnastics, and CC, as well as the progressive calisthenics certification workshop I attended. If you have any feedback, thoughts, or questions, feel free to send them to - owen@strengthcalisthenics.com